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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: DISCUSSION WITH PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR ON  
STABILIZATION AND RECONSTRUCTION IN EASTERN SRI LANKA

REF: A. COLOMBO 1208

[1](#)B. COLOMBO 1318

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr. for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) Ambassador met on September 28 with Basil Rajapaksa, the President's brother, senior political advisor, and coordinator of the stabilization and reconstruction program in the east, to discuss the opportunities and risks in the east (reftels). Rajapaksa acknowledged the need to stop illegal activities by Karuna. He asserted that District Secretaries, Government Agents, and Provincial Councils are

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now managing all of the stabilization and reconstruction efforts in the east and highlighted the appointment of civil-military liaison officers for the districts of Trincomalee, Batticaloa, and Ampara. He also stated that the GSL is sensitive to Tamil and Muslim concerns of Sinhalaization in the east, will share its plans for the High Security Zone south of Trincomalee with the World Bank and other donors, and is consulting with NGO as well as Tamil and Muslim community representatives on its overall development plans for the east. (The GSL has yet to share any plans on the east with donors.) A respected senior local NGO representative later told us that Basil Rajapaksa has good intentions, but lacks the experience to manage the stabilization and reconstruction efforts in the east. The NGO representative suggested to Basil that: a) NGOs and international NGOs work on a plan for short and medium term needs to complement the GSL's longer term infrastructure plans; and b) the GSL ask the international community to fund or detail an humanitarian expert to help Basil manage the reconstruction effort. Both suggestions strike us as useful ways to bring greater order and community as well as NGO participation into a process that has thus far been a top-down Colombo-centered effort. End summary.

## Establish GSL Responsibility for Security, Reduce Role of Military

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¶2. (SBU) The Ambassador opened by congratulating Basil on his appointment as an MP. He asked about the veracity of widespread rumors that the President now intended to appoint him as Minister of Nation Building (a portfolio now held by the President himself but already de-facto in Basil's hands). Rajapaksa laughed and said that was up to the President. Turning to substance, the Ambassador explained the significant opportunity the GSL now has in the east, but also the risks (reftels). Ambassador noted the importance of the GSL assuming complete control for security in the east stopping all illegal Karuna group activities and effecting an orderly transition from military to civilian rule. He described continuing reports the Embassy has received from NGOs of looting and stealing by Karuna cadres, as well as continued harassment of NGOs and the local population. Such activities undercut the efforts of the Government to stabilize the east. Rajapaksa did not dispute the Ambassador's reports, but did note that the GSL is aware of the problem and making efforts to stop illegal activities by Karuna cadres.

¶3. (SBU) With respect to the wider challenge of transitioning to civilian rule, Rajapaksa explained that the Members of Parliament from the Tamil National Alliance and others who complain about the role of the military dismiss the progress that has been made. He complained that the TNA MPs never come to the east and do not spend the allotments allocated to them for local development projects so they do not know the real situation and seek only to criticize. He asserted that the government District Secretaries, Government Agents, and Provincial Councils are now managing all of the stabilization and reconstruction efforts in the east with the military responsible only for security. He also pointed out that the

government had appointed civil military liaison officers for the districts of Trincomalee, Batticaloa, and Ampara, whose job was to liaise with local and international NGOs and reduce obstacles to their operations. The Ambassador welcomed the appointment of the civilian military liaison officers and said that their names had been disseminated widely in the NGO community. He told Rajapaksa candidly that even though the overt military presence was indeed diminishing, many retired military officers were being chosen to fill civilian positions, so the military's influence remains strong.

## Avoid Steps that Alter Ethnic/Demographic Balance and Consult Local Communities More

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¶4. (SBU) The Ambassador noted that the Embassy continues to receive reports from many sources that the government is engaged in efforts to promote Sinhalization in Tamil and Muslim areas in the East. He urged the GSL to consult with Tamil and Muslim community leaders in the East on all of its development plans, so that the reconstruction and development process can be conducted in an inclusive and democratic manner. Rajapaksa responded that the GSL is sensitive to the fears of the Tamil and Muslim communities and does not seek to promote policies that favor Sinhalese over the other two communities. He said that he was hosting a meeting that very afternoon with NGOs and international NGOs to discuss plans for the East. Furthermore, the Government planned to have tripartite consultations between the central government, NGO representatives and local political representatives (Members of Parliament, Provincial Councils, and local Pradeshiya Sabhas) to review sectoral plans. (See para 6 below for feedback on this first meeting that was held.)

## Publicize Plans for Sampur High Security Zone

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¶5. (SBU) The Ambassador urged the government to publicize its plans for the high-security zone south of Trincomalee

explaining that there remains great anxiety in the NGO, Tamil, and Muslim communities about the government's plans. Rajapaksa stated that the people who originally lived in HSZ areas should not be worried. The government is in the process of resettling the original inhabitants. He noted, however, that the government was reluctant to publish a plan for fear that the LTTE would pressure local inhabitants not to return. When pressed he said he would be willing to share the plan on a confidential basis with the World Bank, EU, and other donors who will be helping reconstruction efforts in the area. On the sensitive question of how disputes over land would be resolved, Rajapaksa said the GSL would make use of local land registries, voter lists and lists maintained by divisional secretaries of village inhabitants who had received any kind of government benefits. If IDPs did not have their own land titles, then these other records would help to prove their land claims.

#### Meeting with NGOs

16. (SBU) Embassy subsequently contacted a respected senior Sri Lankan NGO official for a readout of the meeting Rajapaksa chaired on the afternoon of September 28 (para 4). The official stated that Basil Rajapaksa has good intentions, but neither he or any of his assistants are experienced in development work and have not hired people that might be able to help. He said that the meeting had consisted of presentations from many of the 36 ministries working in the East, but there was no integrated plan with the government's overall strategy. The official said that he and other NGO leaders had recommended several steps that would help. First, they suggested that the government needs to distinguish between short and medium term needs to help IDPs and others restart livelihoods, and longer term plans. He suggested that the international community work with NGOs and international NGOs to develop a plan for short and medium term needs, while the government focus on longer term infrastructure and other needs. Rajapaksa agreed to both suggestions. The World Bank and EU will be approached to see if either or both can lead the first effort. The official also suggested that Rajapaksa request the international community to detail or fund a humanitarian expert to Rajapaksa's office, both to advise him on the reconstruction and stabilization process, and to help coordinate consultations with NGOs and local representatives. Rajapaksa will consider this suggestion.

#### Comment

17. (SBU) This was a useful meeting to discuss candidly with Rajapaksa, the person most directly in charge of the East, the concerns many have about the government's plans in the east. As our NGO interlocutor stated, Rajapaksa appears to have good intentions, but lacks the experience to manage this important task alone. The suggestions to have NGOs and INGOs work on a plan for short and medium term needs to complement the GSL's longer term infrastructure plans, and hire an experienced humanitarian expert, strike us as useful ways to bring greater order and community as well as NGO participation into a process that has thus far been a top-down Colombo-centered effort.

BLAKE